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By JOHN L. NESS

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A day after the Government and the Defense Minister, Michel Debré, declared their confidence in the Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionage, known by its initials, S.D.E.C.E., Gen. Pierre Billotte, wartime chief of staff to General de Gaulle and later Defense Minister, said in a radio interview that the matter was far more serious than Mr. Debré had indicated.

The general said it was scandalous that no "credible, complete and stinging denial" could be made to the narcotics charges laid to French agents by indictments in the United States District Court in New-York.

"It is scandalous that one can ask today whether S.D.E.C.E. has been counterfeiting foreign money," he added, in allusion to the \$17,000 in counterfeit American currency found in the apartment used here by Roger Delouette, former agent who pleaded guilty in Newark on Nov. 16 to smuggling heroin into the United States and named Col. Paul Fournier, a high S.D.E.C.E. of-

General Billotte, referring to "libels" inspired by present or former agents, concluded: "This house no longer belongs among republican institutions."

Before Colonel Barberot's interviews, newspapers here recalled that the traitor in the novel had worked for Philippe Henriot, the Vichy Government's Information Minister, during the war; had later served as a military attache, and then joined the secret service.

Colonel Barberot declared that Col. Jacques Beaumont, also known as Rene Bertrant, was dismissed as operations chief of the S.D.E.C.E. last year in "suspicion of high treason." Colonel Beaumont, who has announced a libel suit against Colonel Barberot, worked for Mr. Henriot during the war, then served in Yugoslavia before joining the secret service.

The current troubles of the secret agency recall the Barka case of 1965. At noon

Moroccans who saw the arrest identified the detectives, and in the trial that followed it emerged that the kidnapping had been organized by Antoine Lopez, identified as an agent of the S.D.E.C.E.

In the current press coverage, the picture of the agency is sometimes highly colored with borrowings from Ian Fleming, but some facts emerge.

Like the United States, France has half a dozen intelligence agencies. The real counterespionage agency, is the Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire.

S.D.E.C.E., like the Central Intelligence Agency, is the chief service for foreign espionage, intelligence gathering and, if the lurid accounts are to be believed, "dirty tricks."

Its headquarters is a large U-shaped compound in eastern Paris, called "The Swimming Pool."

The chief operating division is called the Service de Recherche which divides the world into continental sectors. Its files, now computerized, are said to contain data on 10 million persons.